



Exploring the use of Magic Realism and interpreting existentialism in *The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World* by Marquez

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Abstract

"The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" is a short story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez that depicts the arrival of a deceased, drowned man on a secluded island. The narrative requires attention. A deceased individual imbues the islanders' presence with significance, transforming a tangible reality and influencing both social cohesion and fragmentation. This paper draws upon Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism, the usage of magic realism, and Talcott Parsons' theory of social unification to examine these specific elements. This study utilizes the short tale as its major source to demonstrate how a deceased individual can effect change within a live community.

Keywords: Existence, magic realism, integration, disintegration, life, death.

Introduction: Gabriel Garcia Marquez's narrative style about humanity, gender, and the surrounding universe possesses a captivating beauty that simultaneously immerses the reader in profound uncertainty while captivating their attention. "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World," a short story, possesses an allure stemming from its intrinsic grace, fluidity, and flawless structure. Marquez's distinctive characteristic of writing, which evokes

"a special sense of wonder by depicting a world where ice is as unremarkable as a ghost haunting your bathroom, and where the possibility of children being born with pig's tails is regarded as a commonplace reality" (Jordison, "Gabriel García Márquez"),

significantly sets him apart from his contemporaries. Nevertheless, the narrative engenders an inextricable enigma that revitalizes the tension between fiction and reality. The narrative centers on the arrival of a deceased individual on a small island, illustrating the unique quality of Marquez's prose through the islanders' reactions to the corpse. It is widely acknowledged that in Marquez's works, "the narrative's emphasis is placed, not on the story, but rather on how the story is told" (Pelayo 20). This narrative diverges from typical suspense or detective tales, where the focus is on identifying the deceased; rather, it explores how each everyone on the island becomes intricately engaged with the life of the deceased in various ways. Despite being deceased, the corpse astonishingly amazes, shocks, stimulates, unifies, and even disintegrates the islanders. The essence that Marquez imparts to the deceased character, or his identity, emerges as the most investigable inquiry within the narrative. This study has examined many possibilities to provide a satisfying answer to this question. This study examines what the deceased represents by analyzing

the polarities between existence and non-existence, magic and reality, and social integration and dissolution. It is noteworthy that throughout the narrative, the deceased individual is assigned the name Esteban, which instinctively arises in the minds of the islanders. Esteban becomes intertwined with both existential and non-existential states; his death renders him a non-existent being, while his passive effect over the islanders designates him as an existing being. The duality of Esteban has been examined through the lens of Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism. Secondly, the impact of Esteban's enchanting presence on the reality of a small island community has been examined via the lens of the instrumental role of magic realism.

The paper elucidates the integration and dissolution of a tiny island community through the lens of Talcott Parsons' theory of social integration and disintegration. It would be beneficial to investigate how a deceased individual can disrupt communal existence.

Methodology: The principal source of this paper has been determined to be Gabriel Garcia Marquez's short story "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World." This study employs Sartre's existentialism, examines the essence of magic realism, and considers Talcott Parsons' social theory of integration and disintegration to provide a desirable answer to the question of what this deceased individual represents. The paper has not sought to illuminate the worldly identity of the deceased; rather, it has contended to reveal the abstraction that this individual represents.

- (a) **The Handsomest Man Drowned in the World:** "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" is a short tale authored by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in 1968. The narrative centers on a deceased individual, specifically one who has drowned arrives at the island as a cadaver. The youngsters on the beach initially observe him and notify the older individuals, who then transport the deceased man to their island. Consequently, the male residents go due to their limited numbers, while the females remain near the deceased guy. They cleanse his body and visage, extol his attributes, juxtapose him with their spouses, discern his frailties, empathize with him, relinquish their valued possessions for him, bestow a name upon his lifeless form, venerate him deeply, and ultimately allow him to decay with dignity. The narrative is presented as though a deceased individual is spiritually uplifting an entire community. The inquiry, however, depends on the relevance of this deceased individual.
- (b) **A wanderer between existence and non-existence:** The deceased individual referred to by the islanders as Esteban has any tangible ability to integrate into the island, yet unwittingly he becomes to belong to it. Both the psychological and physical dimensions of it. Prior to delineating Esteban's special place, it would be more comprehensible to briefly elucidate the nature of existence and nonexistence. Samuel Enoch Stumpf and James Fieser's study on philosophy indicates that several eighteenth-century philosophers maintained the belief in a universal "human nature" inherent in all individuals. Every individual exemplifies the universal notion of Humanity (434). Esteban embodies human form and traits as he increasingly intrudes onto the daily existence of ordinary islanders. He has a physical homogeneity with the island's inhabitants; however, he is unable to convey his humanity.

Nonetheless, the women on the island contemplate his potential movements and behaviors were he alive. This is the initial procedure in which Esteban physically asserts his affiliation with the community. Esteban possesses an additional quality that extends his existence beyond mortality. Esteban is unable to breathe, yet he elicits sighs from the islanders; he cannot move, yet he compels all the islanders to pursue him in his final moments; he cannot engage in worldly affairs, yet he incites all the islanders to reconsider their worldly pursuits. Consequently, what does it imply - can it be asserted that Esteban exists? According to Samuel Enoch Stumpf, James Fieser, and Sartre's existentialism, "we are what we make of ourselves; we have no one to blame for our condition but ourselves (434)." Esteban's inability to select his desires or preferences, in accordance with Sartre's existentialism, signifies his nonexistence. Thus, who Esteban is - what he embodies as both being and non-existent simultaneously. Esteban embodies an archetype of beauty, vitality, and fortitude. Even in death, his body compels an entire community to contemplate beyond their established limits; nonetheless, he remains non-existent as he does not actively seek to transform these islanders. It is an even larger surprise when a deceased individual possesses the ability to transform an entire community, as articulated by the narrator of the tale:

They did not need to look at one another to realize that they were no longer all present, that they would never be. But they also knew that everything would be different from then on, that their houses would have wider doors, higher ceilings, and stronger floors

so that Esteban's memory could go everywhere without bumping into beams and so that no one in the future would dare whisper the big boob finally died, too bad, the handsome fool has finally died, because they were going to paint their house fronts gay colors to make Esteban's memory eternal...

(Marquez, "The Handsomest Drowned in the World")

This is perhaps where Marquez utilizes the wonders of existence. An imaginary being induces a permanent transformation in the existence of a society. This is where the contention emerges - who exists and who does not. Despite being deceased, Esteban presents a multitude of options for the islanders, who will now lead disparate lives. Conversely, the islanders who are corporeally present emerge to embellish their existence in commemoration of Esteban. This illustrates how, in the essence and remembrance of a community, a non-existent one can endure indefinitely, while the living may appear lifeless despite their existence.

- (a) Magic Realism in his short-story: In defining magic realism, Lois Parkinson Zamora posits in her paper titled "Swords and Silver Rings: Magical Objects in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges." Gabriel García Márquez states:

"Regardless of whether the magic is perceived as inherent in reality or as pre-existing it according to cultural or philosophical belief systems, objects in magical-realist literature function with symbolic energies that differ from those in realistic literature (Zamora 31)."

The object imbued with magic realism operates metaphorically, yet it induces transformation in reality. Consequently, distinguishing between magic and reality becomes exceedingly challenging. In the narrative, Marquez introduces a deceased individual into the quotidian existence of an island, although this corpse is neither decayed

nor malodorous; rather, it exudes an aura of attractiveness and masculinity, as noted within the text.

"Captivated by his immense stature and aesthetic appeal, the women resolved to fashion him trousers from a substantial piece of sailcloth and a shirt from bridal linen, enabling him to proceed through death with dignity."

Marquez's "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World"

What motivates Marquez to depict the extraordinary manifestation of a deceased individual? What necessitates a sudden alteration in the tranquil existence of an island? To address this inquiry, it is pertinent to cite Wen-chin Ouyang, as noted in the introductory chapter of "Empire, Nation, Magic."

Magical realism, in its combination of the fantastic and the real, has been producing political discourses that partake in imagining communities as 'limited, sovereign' nations with roots in 'time immemorial' derived from what are often termed 'local' or 'indigenous' myths, religions and cultures, while subverting realism that has been so much part of the post-Enlightenment empirical worldview that included nationalism (Ouyang 225).

In accordance with the aforementioned notion of magic realism, Esteban transforms into an object of engagement for the entire island population. Assimilating the essence of the country and its inhabitants transforms the drowned man into a larger-than-life character, possessing the ability to influence the lives of everyone around him. Esteban's metamorphosis from a tangible entity to an archetypal one will influence every facet of the islanders' existence. Marquez, consequently, endeavors to portray the deceased as an enriched past by incorporating elements of magical realism into the narrative. The islanders, who have never encountered him and are unaware of life beyond their small island, suddenly designate him as Esteban, venerate him, and strategize their future with him in mind—these actions undoubtedly signify a profound societal transformation rooted in faith in a specific ideology. In literary works, no other technique can elucidate such significant communal transformation as well as magic realism. The utilization of magic realism as a vehicle for political, religious, and local ideology is a prominent tactic in contemporary literature. In this narrative by Marquez, Esteban's enchanting emergence serves as the genesis of a myth that the society will sustain for an extended period.

- (b) A symbol of integration and disintegration: Upon Esteban's arrival on the island, numerous disclosures concerning both the locale and its inhabitants occur. While the men venture out to ascertain the women remain behind the deceased's true identity. The women contemplate the deceased man, becoming captivated by him, and discover a means to articulate their unexpressed desires. At this juncture, the society becomes split. It has been noted in the text:

The men thought the fuss was only womanish frivolity. Fatigued because of the difficult nighttime inquiries, all they wanted was to get rid of the bother of the newcomer once and for all before the sun grew strong on that arid, windless day...But the more they hurried, the more the women thought of ways to waste time. They walked about like startled hens, pecking with the sea charms on their breasts, some interfering on one side to put a scapular of the good wind on the drowned man... (Marquez, "The Handsomest Drowned in the World")

For the first time, society is bifurcated into the realms of men and women. What the man perceives as "womanish frivolity" transforms into femininity tool to express their valued

aspirations and desires. Marquez indicates that henceforth, the women of the island will no longer contemplate their husbands; rather, they will immerse themselves in the allure of this young man who embodies the idealized perfection that everyone aspires to. "However, they were also aware that everything would change from that point forward..." Marquez, "The Most Handsome Drowned Man in the World" This argument elucidates how a society disintegrates. This research relies on Parsons' theoretical framework concerning this assertion:

Parsons recognized that no actual social system was ever likely to attain perfect integration. Some "slippage" was always to be expected. For example, some individuals may want to comply with particular role expectations, but be unable to do so. At the opposite extreme, however, Parsons considered and rejected the possibility of complete disintegration (Abrahamson 48).

The reflection of Parsons' beliefs concerning the integration and disintegration of society is clearly articulated in the short narrative. The islanders recognize that the deceased, Esteban, is distinct from them and merits a magnificent farewell; concurrently, they experience disintegration as the women begin to dream of Esteban rather than their husbands, leading to a reconfiguration of their homes and memories henceforth. Consequently, the deceased individual serves as a symbol of both integration and dissolution. The question, however, remains regarding what this deceased individual represents. Parsons posits that a society cannot be entirely integrated or dissolved; rather, there exists a pivotal point that serves as the catalyst for both integration and disintegration. Esteban embodies the concepts of diversity, beauty, and inspiration that the ladies of the island hold dear. By locating him, they have discovered the means to ultimately realize their ambition. For them, the deceased transforms into a memory replete with joy, affection, and contentment. The island's men have come to recognize a new aspect of their wives due to Esteban's arrival. A revelation of disintegration emerges as the islanders recognize the necessity for larger doors in their homes and the expansion of their infrastructure to allow Esteban's memory to roam freely. This is, consequently, the point to be incorporated. Consequently, Esteban emerges as a figure from the past who revitalizes and introduces a new wave of transformation concurrently. To the islanders, he is a captivating memory to be revisited often and a reminder of the essential social principle of integration and dissolution.

Conclusion: Gabriel Garcia Marquez possesses an extraordinary narrative ability, which attains a new level when he intertwines the fantastical with the real. In this little narrative, Marquez engages with the collective psychology via an individual named Esteban. Esteban transcends the confines of a mere individual, emerging as a spectral figure that incites extensive discourse about life, reality, and societal constructs. This research has attempted to elucidate the potential implications of Esteban's presence on the island. Marquez conveys not merely an attractive narrative to relish; instead, he endeavors to connect with the fundamental nature of the place and humanity. In this endeavor, Marquez frequently employs several approaches that facilitate his expression of intended messages. "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" exemplifies a narrative set in a distant and unfamiliar realm, yet it fundamentally explores themes of existence, vitality, and the transcendent nature of life.

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